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ENGLAND

AND

AN ACCOUNT FOR SOME OF OUR

STRIKING PECULIARITIES

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS

TO A FRIEND IN FRANCE.

BY AN ENGLISHMAN

" ENGLAND! with all thy faults, I love thee still
My Country! And while yet a nook is left
Where English Minds and MANNERS may be found
Shall be constrained to love thee."

London:

Printed for John Booth,
DUKE STREET, PORTLAND PLACE.

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Brief Remarks

ON

ENGLISH MANNERS,

AND

AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR SOME OF OUR MOST STRIKING PECULIARITIES.

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1816.

1910

ENGLISH

AND

GERMAN

LANGUAGE.

PREFACE.

AS it may appear in the following Remarks that I am at variance with myself;—that is, with the motto I have adopted in my title page, I wish to observe that in expressing with Cowper my attachment to English *Manners*, I understand the word to signify, as he probably did, general moral conduct;—and that, when I venture to criticise certain national peculiarities in our manners, I view the term in its more limited sense, and complain of defects in our system of politeness, or exteriour manner.

At a period when our national character has been raised to an unprecedented height of glory it may prove a wholesome exercise to investigate the nature of our defects;—a task in which human beings are at all times too backward to engage. It might indeed be justly considered to indicate a morose, ungrateful disposition if any of us failed to acknowledge the many virtues

which Providence permits to flourish in this favoured land;—nor can I approve the advice sometimes given by moral writers, to attempt the eradication of those feelings of satisfaction which we derive individually, or nationally, from the performance of praiseworthy actions. These feelings have been implanted in our hearts, no doubt for the wisest purposes; and although the religion we profess commands us to give GOD the glory and the praise, it surely does not correspond with our notions of His beneficent nature to imagine that He would have us consider ourselves as mere tools in His hands. Indeed we know, from his own sacred authority, that this is not the case;—and if we carefully examine our hearts, I think we shall find that, at those moments when our gratitude for the mercies bestowed on us is the most lively, and when our acknowledgment of the source whence our blessings are derived predominate most in our minds;—then are our feelings of self-satisfaction the most complete.

But though I consider this feeling virtuous in itself, it is of great importance to prevent its gaining that ascendancy over our thoughts which the consideration of our national virtues and prosperity tends so strongly to promote.

The subject I have chosen is allowed by all to be highly interesting; but though we admit as a general principle that the "proper study of mankind is *man*;" it is astonishing how seldom his conduct is made the subject of rational discussion. The superficial varieties in life and manners indeed are continually described in the mass of light compositions with which the press abounds; but the principles on which we act are rarely investigated;—nor am I aware of any work having hitherto appeared expressly written to point out the peculiarities of our manners and customs as opposed to those of foreign nations, and at the same time with a view to explain the causes of such striking deviations from the general usage of the world.

To know oneself has been considered in all ages the grand desideratum. The attainment of this knowledge however, has ever been described as not only difficult but almost hopeless. Yet there is but one obstacle to the undertaking, and that not insurmountable. For if we *sincerely endeavour* to acquire a knowledge of ourselves the difficulty is overcome;—as we certainly possess the means of understanding our own character in a much more perfect and satisfactory way than that of any other person. Still it must be

confessed the prejudices excited by our vanity are numberless, and they are only to be resisted by constant exertion, and reiterated efforts *to be candid.* So it is with national prejudices. It requires the greatest stretch of candour and the constant practice of that virtue to subdue them.

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LETTER 1.

My Dear Friend,

IN compliance with the wish you expressed when we parted in France, I will now attempt to describe to you the impression which the manners of my countrymen, after a long absence, have made on my mind.

You will not be surprized, (recollecting the many conversations we have had on the subject) to find my opinion of the exteriour manner, which is all I mean to treat of, far from favourable. I am not aware that English society is now on a worse footing than in our younger days; but the fact is, that, in whatever country it falls to our lot to be born and bred, we grow up, in

spite of the best instruction, with our heads full of prejudices, which it should be the business of maturer life to root out. Do not let it be imagined, for an instant however, that I mean to censure that generous love of our country, which providence has implanted in our hearts, no doubt for the wisest purposes. "Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy." But though an inherent love of our country, and consequent notion of its superiority are natural to us, yet *Truth* is, on the whole, so devoutly to be wished, that we should carefully avoid carrying even this general feeling, this useful prejudice to an unreasonable extent.

But the national prejudices I have alluded to above, are chiefly those of less importance, relating to customs and manners; and though these are indulged by the natives of all countries, in a greater or less degree, I fear there is no people, who cherish them more eagerly, and with less candour than ourselves. The pernicious effect of

this ungenerous indulgence is twofold. It teaches us to despise the manners of our neighbours indiscriminately, good or bad, instead of candidly selecting such parts as are good for imitation; while the same train of feelings leads to the adoption of peculiarities of our own, which foreigners cannot imitate with advantage to themselves, though they are led to dislike us for possessing them.

It would perhaps be impossible to point out all the causes that combine to produce our national peculiarities; but the attempt to account generally for the most obvious of them cannot be uninteresting. Goldsmith, in his admirable poem of the Traveller, describes our national character with his usual discernment and knowledge of human nature. Our unsocial turn he ascribes to "that independence Britons prize too high;" and this strained feeling of independence may not improperly be considered the foundation of the greater part of our peculiarities, which are all, I

think, of an unsocial character; and therefore not to be defended, in spite of the fascination which the notion of independence carries with it. People however, are apt to remark; "as this feeling of independence has raised us to our present glorious, political preeminence, we may be well satisfied to bear with the evils resulting from the same cause that produces all our national greatness and happiness. All communities are remarkable for some peculiar foibles; and we had better not be too anxious to destroy our's, lest at the same time we root out our national virtues."

Now this I take to be false reasoning: for, as the foibles are not the *causes* of the virtues, but only similarly produced *effects*, I do not see why the rooting out or diminishing of the one, should have even a tendency to lessen the value of the other; and, if I succeed in proving, which I shall attempt to do, that an indulgence in these foibles is decidedly at enmity with sound

morality, it evidently becomes our duty to correct them. Without considering the characteristic manners of any particular country, it is obvious that there is a general system of good breeding which all acknowledge to exist, though the peculiar niceties of it may be disputed. As christians we willingly appeal to the benevolent morality of the gospel as the origin of our social intercourse. And, in fact, any marked deviation from that revered code will always be condemned by men of refined manners, without any *immediate*, sometimes without *any* reference to this great authority. All well educated persons understand the general outline of this system of good breeding. To appreciate it correctly, however, a refined taste and nice discrimination are necessary; and it appears to me that the true delicacy of good breeding is no where so well *understood* as in this country; our frequent and sometimes gross deviations from it in *practice*, are therefore, the more unaccountable.

LETTER 2.

EVERY MAN'S HOUSE IS HIS CASTLE.

This sentiment we trace back at once to our independent political feelings. But satisfactory as it is to reflect on the security we enjoy in our dwellings against all political intruders, yet the carrying this principle so much into common life as we do, appears very unamiable to foreigners and to all candid observers. Indeed, to confess the truth, the education and habits of our country do not qualify us for easy intercourse in general society. The greater part of us are inclined to make too serious a business of a casual meeting with a stranger, and to shrink from a frank communication, even on the most trivial subjects, with any one, unless we are intimately acquainted with his general train of thinking.

This unsocial feeling is encreased on the approach of a stranger to our habitations; and the announcing of a new acquaintance usually produces an uncomfortable sensation in the mind of the host, who thinks within himself, if he does not express it in his looks, "what the deuce does this fellow want here?" And a case of this kind is rendered more distressing, by the visitor having probably felt quite as much reluctance to enter the ho use as the other has to receive him; while he would be infinitely more annoyed at the nature of his reception, than a foreigner would under the same circumstances. For though unaccustomed to our coldness of manner, *he* would only think it very *odd*, without being disconcerted at it, by any means in an equal degree with a shy Englishman, to whom it is natural. This is indeed one of the few things to which *use* does not reconcile us. We continue through life to feel *surprized* at the dry, odd manners of our countrymen which we have witnessed and probably practised ourselves from our

cradles. This may be accounted for by reverting to the cause I have noticed above, viz. an overweening spirit of sturdy independence, which makes us alike unstudious to please, and ill disposed to submit to the same failing in others.

With respect to the custom of denying ourselves to company when we choose to be alone, I must say it is one of our peculiarities, of which, under certain circumstances, I highly approve. The various classes of gentry in this country undoubtedly employ their time more usefully than those of equal rank in foreign countries. Constant intrusion, therefore, would prove in many instances extremely irksome; and a free admission of visitors in London, or any such populous place, to those who wish to improve their time, intolerable. But this privilege is frequently carried too far, and exerted when no such good reason exists for its adoption; indeed we seldom receive a stranger-visitor, under any circumstances, with complacency.

In London there is so little cordiality, that one is agreeably surprised, to meet with it in persons, even with whom one fancies oneself on terms of intimacy. This excessive coldness proceeds in part from the multitude of engagements, and pursuits that occupy the minds of many in the metropolis. For let the pursuit be business or pleasure, if keenly followed up, it leaves but little leisure, or inclination for social intercourse. Yet among the vast numbers, that reside in London, there are many who lead, for the most part, quiet domestic lives. The addition, therefore, of a few friends to their family party would seem a desirable acquisition. But though the people of this country relish quiet, social meetings as much, or more than any foreigners; yet, from some want of arrangement they contrive to enjoy them less frequently than in any other country; and we seem readily to avail ourselves of the plea of engagements which London affords, to shrink into our native shyness.

But another powerful motive operates in London to render the houses of its inhabitants, in a manner inaccessible. I mean the prevailing feeling, that we cannot ask a friend to visit us, without cramming him with meat and drink. Now, whether it arises from habit and prejudice I do not know, but it certainly appears to me that partaking of a meal with our friends is the most social, satisfactory way of meeting. In England a gentleman, whatever may be his pursuits, does not feel settled till he sits down to dinner; and, having taken a great deal of exercise before, he is seldom inclined to move after that meal. Foreigners indeed find great fault with us for making so much more of a *business* of eating and drinking than they do: and surely they have had too much reason hitherto for censuring us in this point. The custom, however, of sitting a long time after dinner for the sake of drinking, is, I am most happy to think, nearly exploded; and I heard a candid, I wish I could consider it in all cases a just, reason assigned by a

foreigner, for our remaining longer together at that time than those of other countries. He was an intelligent Flemish priest; and an Englishman complaining to him, of our indulging too much in the pleasures of the table, he remarked, that there was another good reason for our doing so, besides our affection for the bottle. "You Englishmen, said he, are, for the most part, men of information, and have consequently subjects for conversation. But if *we* were left together for the same period we should be puzzled to find rational topics to converse on."

What contributes, however, more than all to exclude even our intimate friends from a social, frank admission into our houses, particularly in London, is our wealth: The favourite style of society in this country, as I have observed above, is a quiet, social meeting of a few friends. But our great encrease in wealth, has produced such an extensive system of luxurious competition in our mode of living,

that a gentleman is ashamed to invite even a friend to dine with him, unless he can entertain him in an expensive manner; while the lady of the house is struck with dismay on the unexpected arrival of a stranger at the hour of dinner. This dread of a stranger discovering our ordinary mode of living, which prevails very generally in England, is surely a vulgar feeling. There are indeed some few rich persons who, themselves "faring sumptuously every day," will not perhaps understand my description of this feeling. But, compared to the great bulk of gentry, the number quite devoid of embarrassment on such an alarming occasion is very small. As far as I have been able to observe, the sensation is not known in foreign countries. On the contrary, I have constantly seen foreigners astonished at our backwardness to enter their apartments when they were engaged at their meals, while they make no scruple of attending our tables on similar occasions.

These unsocial, or perhaps more properly, selfish feelings certainly predominate in a greater degree in London. The country is more justly considered the home of an Englishman. Many persons of good fortune find themselves disposed, when in town, to live savingly; either from the causes I have mentioned, or from a desire to lay out the greatest portion of their income at their country-house. But even in the country, there is a great absence of social feeling. The neighbouring gentry visit each other, and parties are made occasionally for meeting at each other's houses. But this meeting is generally a dull, formal sort of thing; and, being considered more a duty, or return of civility, than a spontaneous act, prompted by social feeling, very little effect is produced by it.

But what I chiefly complain of in this mode of associating is, that it is selfish. We invite those who can invite us again, and thus forget, or at least deviate from the *spirit* of that golden rule: "When thou

makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee:" —while we lose the gratification which should arise from inviting those, to whom our countenance would prove most grateful and acceptable. "I was a stranger, and ye took me not in;" we consider abstractedly a keen reproach; but to profit by it we should apply it to our own conduct.

Of course I do not recommend giving up the society of our own familiar friends, and supplying their place with strangers. But I do contend, that the *spirit* of the above divine precept should not be lost sight of by any of us; for, no doubt, some one description of strangers or other is likely to fall in the way of each of us occasionally, to whom comfort may be afforded by our attention or kindness. For instance, I recollect our friend ——— complaining bitterly to me of his reception in this country. Being a Hanoverian, and therefore our fellow subject, he expected to be re-

ceived, as he would have received any of us, in his own country, with open arms. But though a man of polished manners, and perfectly correct conduct, he was not invited to pass the threshold of an Englishman's door for four years after he arrived in this country. Was this benevolent conduct towards a stranger? My friend was much surprized when I assured him that the same distance would have been preserved towards an English officer under similar circumstances. For he had attributed the reserve to our *hatred of foreigners*, and if he had left England at the expiration of the four years, his love for us would not have been very cordial. He happened, however, to be removed soon after to another quarter, where, by some lucky chance, he fell into society; and, when he understood our character, he liked us so much, as to take to himself an English wife. A candid man could not be blamed for pretending to give an opinion of a people, after residing four years in their country; but we see it might not,

after all, be a fair opinion. Yet how prone are we to decide on the character of a foreign nation, before we have lived four weeks amongst them!

LETTER 3.

SHYNESS.

UNDER this head a vast variety of extraordinary manner and conduct is contained. The general term by which the French designate it, (mauvaise honte) I think describes it fairly; for, whether it proceed from a good, or a bad motive, it must be acknowledged a defect, and its removal considered desirable, its visible effects being nearly the same whatever the cause may be. It requires indeed a great deal of discernment, and frequently a long acquaintance with the persons labouring under this distressing malady, to enable us to decide on the real cause that produces it. Foreigners, I do not speak of Frenchmen alone, accuse

us of being all more or less tainted with this disease. Doubtless they perceive it, or they would not be unanimous, as I believe they are, in expressing the opinion: and though we, from closer observation, are apt to discriminate, and to term this man cold and reserved, and another frank and sprightly; we may discover, I believe, if we chuse to look candidly and fairly into our own minds, that most of us are in some degree influenced by the feelings which give rise to the shy reserve of which foreigners complain. We do not scruple to regard Frenchmen, in a mass, as volatile, loquacious and impertinent; Germans as blunt and phlegmatic; and Spaniards as pompous, haughty and indolent: ought we therefore to be offended at their describing us generally by some of our less favourable characteristics, and representing us as a morose, uncivil, uncourteous race?

Do you recollect, my friend, your coming up to me at the Opera in London, some years ago, and telling me you had just discovered why foreigners disliked us so

much? "Believe me," added you, "it is because we never offer them snuff!" You then described having placed yourself at the end of one of the seats in the pit, where you were greatly incommoded by want of room. Having suffered this inconvenience for some time, it occurred to you to offer a pinch of snuff to a foreign gentleman sitting next you. Your stratagem succeeded perfectly. The foreigner, struck with this *uncommon* instance of politeness, began, the moment he had received it, to shove and bustle about in a polite way, but so effectually, that he soon procured you a superabundance of room.

Your observation was founded in a correct knowledge of human nature. All civilized beings are gratified by these little attentions and civilities; and, however backward we may be to acknowledge it, we are *uncivilized*, inasmuch as we are deficient in those practices, which afford universal satisfaction.

I remember, when a youth, being myself oppressed in an uncommon degree, by what we call shyness; and long after I became a man, I retained in my mind some confused notion that the reserve it produced was a necessary, if not a desirable trait in the manners of an English gentleman. I was particularly led to form this opinion from observing how greatly it prevailed in the manners of those who constitute what is commonly called the *best company*. Nor was it till after a residence of some length in foreign countries, that I came to understand why this part of our character is so repulsive to strangers, and how truly objectionable it is in itself.

There is no end to the various ways in which this failing shews itself. I recollect some years ago being introduced to an eminent public character. The introduction was proposed to me by an intimate friend of his, at whose house we met; there was therefore no intrusion on my part. When I had made my bow I naturally

expected him, as the greatest man, to speak to me. But no: he stared, blushed like a young girl, seemed to make an effort within himself to call up a word or two; but not succeeding in his attempt, he stalked away without uttering a syllable. This we call shyness; but by what cause, or combination of causes it is produced, it is difficult to determine. It is not, however, a manner for imitation.

The following is another variety of shyness. A man of high rank in this country, who is known to be remarkably shy, was once observed by a looker-on, when he had the game in his hands, to throw down his cards as though he had lost it. The gentleman who had noticed this, being a friend of the great man, enquired of him privately afterwards, why he had acted thus, and was answered that he did not feel *equal* to receiving the congratulations of the company on his success.

One man I know who, if you call on him, will probably look frowningly at you,

without speaking when you are shewn into the room, and then turn his back upon you. But he does not mean to express "get out" by this. It is his *manner*; and he is, in other respects, a worthy, excellent man, of gentlemanly feelings and principles.

It may be said that these are exaggerated specimens of English breeding: and so I trust they are. In describing a general national failing, it may perhaps too, be objected as unfair to dwell on particular instances. Yet where but in England should we find so many curious varieties of the species? And surely it may be allowed, in the way of elucidation, to produce such traits of character as force themselves at every turn on the notice of any one at all gifted with the power of observation.

But without descending to particular instances of conduct, this feature in our national character is so obvious as to afford abundant ground for general remark.

Is it not well known, for instance, that if two English gentlemen meet accidentally as strangers in a room, they do not consider themselves bound, scarcely even at liberty, to speak to each other; and if one happens to have less English coldness than the other, he still fears to address his companion, lest he should subject himself to a suspicious glance, and a dry monosyllable as his reply. "Sir;" said Doctor Johnson (who will not be accused of partiality to foreign manners) "this is to be ignorant of the common rights of hum aty."

Any person going to one of the public offices, in London, to obtain an audience of a great man, will be struck with a strong exemplification of this unamiable peculiarity. It has happened to me several times to attend in one of the waiting rooms on these occasions, and on entering the apartment, I have found, perhaps three or four gentlemen assembled for the same purpose, but so careful not to intrude on each others Conversation or even notice, that

they have retired into separate corners of the room, and given themselves up to silent meditation. I have seen the number encrease gradually to twenty or thirty, and though the room would not afford a corner for each, it is whimsical to observe the ingenuity with which they contrive to divide the space amongst them, with the same object evidently in view; viz: that of shunning all intercourse with their neighbour. One will seat himself on a table, and earnestly watch the motion of his swinging leg; another will turn his back on the rest of the party, and amuse himself by looking out at the window; while a third will place himself directly before the fire, and calling in the aid of his coat skirts to exclude his companions from a sight of it, will remain with his eyes fixed on vacancy till one side is well roasted; and then he will turn the other. Many amongst the number doubtless feel as I do on these occasions, and wish sincerely to break the solemn gloom by friendly intercourse, but are withheld by the

same cause that often deters me, that is; the fear, perhaps frequently groundless, of a repulse; for a man must be indeed far gone in John Bullism who would absolutely take offence at an overture plainly dictated by civility, or a desire to be social.

I fear, however, persons of this description are to be found in society in this country, and that there are classes in which they predominate. But surely if in making the attempt, as above, to introduce humane manners, we encounter one of these pests, it is beneath the refinement of a gentleman to resent such conduct, or to allow himself to be deterred by one or two failures from similar attempts in future.

LETTER 4.

RESERVE.

In my last letter I dwelt chiefly on the characteristicks of *shyness*, though

it is not clear to me, that all the traits I enumerated there, can be fairly charged to that failing. Indeed I do not know a better argument for combating against *shyness* than the extreme difficulty of deciding from what cause *reserve* in general proceeds. It is sometimes occasioned by a shy, modest diffidence; but frequently by conceit and arrogance. How distressing then must be the reflection to a really amiable person, that the timid shyness observable in his behaviour, is continually mistaken for the reserve of superciliousness. I am convinced, however, that there is a certain mixture of pride in the most amiable kind of reserve for which the men, and still more the women of this country are distinguished. For it is in a great measure produced by their thinking too much of themselves. If it is a question, for instance, (as in my last letter) whether I should venture to speak to a person or not, I am apt to debate the matter in my own mind for a considerable time before I make the bold attempt.

"Shall I say something to him?" "Yes, to be sure." "What can I say?" "Oh! any thing is better than sitting twirling your thumbs like a fool." "But *perhaps* he is *proud* and will not answer me; or *perhaps* he is a blockhead, and will have nothing to say in reply; or *perhaps*—In short, I am conscious of having myself, lost a great deal of comfort and much agreeable conversation (many of my countrymen and women I do not doubt have done the same) by allowing this doubting, *perhaps*-feeling to prevail. And, after all, whatever may have been the pride of those to whom I have applied the doubt, I stand convicted to myself of pride, in having rated my own importance too highly. For what real harm can the cold reception of his remarks occasion to a man? His pride, or vanity is mortified, and that is all. But there's the rub. That is the mortification we silly mortals bear with less patience than any other.

But there is a kind of behaviour, which I am sorry to say I have observed since I

returned to this country, as by no means uncommon. It is a sort of reserve, frequently passing under the denomination of shyness, which comes and goes at will: that is, it is apt to assume a dry, cold, sometimes haughty and repulsive manner towards persons who are poor, or otherwise of *no sort of consequence*; and a gracious affable demeanour towards those of higher rank or larger fortune. I complain perhaps of the distant, forbidding manner of a young lady with whom I have been attempting to converse; and the explanation is; "Oh! poor thing; she is so shy!" "That accounts for it:" think I. Presently after perhaps, I observe this shy young lady conversing in the most familiar, unembarrassed way with a young man. "She does not appear to be shy now;" I remark. "Why you know;" replies my informant, dear Lord—is *so very agreeable*!" "True" say I.—Now poor Parson Adams would have been puzzled to explain this contradiction:—or rather he would

have decided modestly; "Doubtless my Lord is a much more agreeable man than I am—for the young lady, as a rational being, cannot be influenced by the accidental circumstances of his title or fortune."

However, when reserve takes this decided turn, and is thus exhibited in outward acts, it does not require much discernment to distinguish it from the genuine, modest shyness, which is so much more conspicuous in the young females of this country than elsewhere; and which, though it must be acknowledged in some degree a failing, we can hardly wish them, while very young, to be free from. For, as perfection in manner is no more to be expected in this world than any other kind of perfection, we must be contented to bear with those failings which are most consonant to nature. Diffidence is so desirable in a young mind, and shyness so natural a result of diffidence, that the total absence of it is generally a proof of want of delicate feelings. The business of education seems to be,

gradually to eradicate as much of this diffidence as tends to produce uncomfortable restraint of manner without blunting the feelings. It appears to me, indeed, that education is good in proportion as it succeeds in this object; and I am convinced that in most instances, where shyness pursues a person through life, it arises from neglect of education. There is no habit that encreases more unless checked in time, nor any that requires more delicate treatment. It not unfrequently degenerates into absolute rudeness:—of which I had a proof lately, on being shewn into a room at a house where I went to make a visit, in which were several young ladies seated round a table. The moment they saw a stranger enter, two or three of them ran off to a window at the further end of the room, and of those remaining at the table, all except one hung down their heads so intently over their work that, a shy man myself, I should have felt rather awkwardly situated, if the one excepted had not behaved with more propriety. I do not con-

sider this by any means an uncommon case. The young ladies I have just described belonged to the class of high life, in which this kind of behaviour is more likely to occur. The reason is obvious. Girls in high life are kept in the nursery, learning accomplishments till they are grown up, and then they rush into the gay world;—that is, from one extreme to another all at once, and pick up a manner as well as they can. Whereas plain people of moderate fortune are contented to have their daughters, of all ages, pretty constantly under their own eye; by which means the improvement in their manners goes hand in hand with their other acquirements, and thus gives them what appears to me an evident advantage over their too refined superiours.

That which frequently adds to the *reserve* of our manners, particularly in London, is the foolish dread many feel, of being considered either too poor to give entertainments, or not of sufficient importance to be admitted into the dissipation

of high life. They pretend therefore to engagements which they have not, and return to pass that time uncomfortably at home which might be spent more agreeably with their friends, if they could prevail on themselves to break the ceremonious ice of fashion, and to be social in spite of so many freezing examples to the contrary. For though epicurianism is a vice of the age, and it is too much the fashion to talk and think of luxurious eating and drinking; doubtless every one has some friends who will be glad to visit him for the sake of a social meeting, and not merely for the sake of guttling. Or if a man makes up his mind that he cannot afford to give dinners of any kind, surely it is better for him to tell his friends so frankly, and to request to see them at his house after he has gone through the ceremony of dining with his family. This you know is the general style of going on in foreign countries, and the introduction of the custom in London would be delightful. I know I have felt the want of it keenly, and so must every

one in my situation. For, as society is constituted at present, none but persons of high rank or great connections can find their way into it without much labour and difficulty; and, when one has attained it, is it worth the trouble? I never heard any one, except now and then a very young girl at her first going out, say that the mobbing of a London rout was any thing but insipid. If a man's connections enable him as a thing of course to fall into this dull routine, he often follows it because there is nothing more rational to be had. But how many hundreds of unfortunate beings there are, who would fain think themselves gentlemen, but who are as much excluded from this senseless amusement even as the Jew boys who carry oranges about the streets.

I have often been amused by being told in the country, "well, I suppose you will be very *gay* in town." Now my gaiety when in London consists in this.—I walk about the town as much as I please

during the morning, and see all the gay carriages and people. I meet such of my friends as happen to be out, and after nodding to them till I am tired, I return to my solitary home. I have then the choice of dining at a tavern or at my lodging; after which I may either go to the play or the opera, or I may sit at home alone if I prefer it. Being acquainted with a good many families in London I make a point, not being fond of a solitary life, to leave a card at each of their houses. Some three or four, perhaps, (who are always the same, uncongealed even by the atmosphere of London) write me a cordial note, and ask when I can give them the pleasure of my company. But, for the most part, no notice is taken of my call for five or six weeks, at the end of which perhaps the visit is returned; and, if the person is a near relation or connection, he considers one invitation to meet a family party during my stay as very handsome treatment. If he has no such motive he does not invite me to his house at all, but expresses a

hope, if I chance to meet him in the street, that he may see *more* of me *next time* I come to town, and the meeting is adjourned sine die; for perhaps I am then preparing to leave the country again for an unlimited period.

LETTER 5.

THE GREAT WORLD.

SOCIETY is usually divided into three classes;—gentry, middling class and poor, But I conceive a fourth class may with propriety be added; viz. the great world; which considers itself, and is in fact a distinct body, separated by a thousand peculiarities from the humdrum mass of inferiour people. As some of these peculiarities are very striking, and differ materially in this country from those of high life in foreign countries, I shall endeavour candidly to point out some of the most

remarkable amongst them, and add an observation or two on their injurious tendency.

I am disposed to class under the head, 'great world' all those who, from wealth, rank, or station are enabled to hold their place fairly in the regions of fashion. I say fairly, because there are many pretenders to this envied station who, with all their efforts, find themselves barely tolerated by those they aspire to live with. What constitutes precisely a man of the world, in this its confined sense, it is very difficult to say. In other countries it is more easily defined, the leading society with them being in general composed of the nobility exclusively. Under the head nobility, however, foreigners usually class what we call country gentlemen, or proprietors of land.

In England every man born to a title (unless very poor) may be said to belong, as a matter of course, to this great class. In

like manner all who fill high offices, and all private gentlemen of good family and considerable fortune. Persons of very recent elevation, unless they are enormously rich, do not fall as a matter of course, into this class of society, but are obliged in order to reach it to use continued exertions, such as giving magnificent entertainments, &c. &c.

Private gentlemen of moderate fortune, not finding themselves admitted on easy terms to the society of this fraternity, generally keep aloof from it; except some few of their number who are fond of the sound of titles, and who are contented to endure much inconvenience and many mortifications for the sake of associating with the owners of them. But there are many instances of persons gaining free admission into the society, who are not entitled to the distinction by any of the qualifications I have described above, as generally necessary for that purpose. The near connections, for instance, of men

of high rank or influence: persons who, from a great flow of spirits, or other causes, have the faculty of making themselves generally agreeable in company: authors who have written on popular subjects, or whose works happen, for some reason or other, to *take* with the public: and a numerous class of people who, by means of paying court to some great personage, have had their good qualities (though perhaps possessed of few) extolled in high terms, and this gives them a sort of eclât that compensates for want of wealth or title, and establishes them, to a certain degree, in the walks of fashionable life.

These various descriptions of persons then, may be said to unite so far as to form a class, or society, which is distinguished by obvious features from the great bulk of gentry.

But although there appears to be a general similitude of manner among them, and

a general bond of union that influences their conduct towards each other; a near observer will easily discover strong shades of difference in their sentiments, and find that a man of high rank, though he unbends more freely towards one of much lower conditon who happens to follow the same routine of life as himself, than towards a private gentleman of greater respectability; yet he considers himself in fact of much more importance in the world than his associate. A peer of old family and long established rank, regards a new made peer with a feeling bordering on contempt, and so does a private gentleman of ancient family, one of newly acquired property. Viewing them, however, as forming one body, I wish to consider their peculiarities under the same head.

Doubtless the ardent and unceasing pursuit of gaiety, or pleasure, produces some similar, general symptoms in all countries. But while in foreign lands this sort of unmeaning dissipation tends rather

to refine the manners, in England it seems to me to have a contrary effect; and those to whom we naturally look up as patterns of ease and elegance, are frequently, nay commonly found to be distinguished more by dry, unprofitable reserve than by courtesy and civility of manner.

In attempting to account for the distance, and frequently the haughtiness assumed by persons in high life, I must revert again to the independent feeling assigned by Goldsmith. For in a free state like this there are persons in all ranks, who are led by the feeling of independence to set themselves up, as equal to those whom the rules of society have placed above them: and, of such as these, men of high rank are naturally jealous. But I think they mistake their own interest by attempting thus to obviate the inconveniences they dread, and particularly by not discriminating between real gentlemen who require no such hint, and vulgar-minded men who do. Experience

indeed proves they are mistaken in this point; for it shews that men possessed of the true feelings of a gentleman need no cold superciliousness of manner to prevent too much familiarity in their intercourse with persons of superiour rank, they rather want encouragement; while those who have not the same delicacy of feeling, are not to be repressed by it.

Indeed, the great mass of gentry in this country, being accustomed from their infancy to observe this extraordinary coldness and distance in the manners of those we style "the great," grow up, (as I have described above to have been my own case) with an impression that such dryness is a necessary part of an English nobleman's character; and it requires a vast deal of intercourse with foreigners, and many a struggle with one's feelings, to get the better, even of so unworthy and unnatural a prejudice as this. For, in GOD's name, what can there be to recommend so wide a deviation from his sacred precepts—from

the benevolent system of *manners* prescribed for universal adoption in the gospel!

I may be accused of illiberality, and possibly of ignorance of my subject, but I do sincerely think that, with various good qualities for which the great in this country shine conspicuous among the nations of the world; they are also remarkable for possessing a freezing indifference of manner towards those of all classes below them, which has a strong, and by no means an agreeable effect on society in general. For though, of all people in the world, we are the least distinguished for servile adulation of rank and title; we are naturally, though imperceptibly, led to adopt the very defects of which we complain in the manners of the higher classes. Still, we are never satisfied with the prevailing manner of our countrymen, and always delighted when we meet with happy deviations from it. In the manners of an English gentleman, for instance, who, with a candid mind, has made his observations on foreign nations, and

who, with the judiciousness that good taste inspires, has borrowed as much of their vivacity as accords with his natural character, we at once acknowledge a most agreeable improvement. But, though struck with the pleasantness of the deviation, we consider it more as a manner to wonder at and admire than to follow. And, to be sure, a fortunate combination of circumstances is requisite to enable us to copy such an example with brilliant success. But still much may be done in this way by every one who sincerely endeavours to improve his manners. If he cannot succeed in becoming graceful, he may at least attain a greater degree of civility and courtesy than we commonly possess.

I feel conscious, and have frequently been told by my friends, that my own manners are, even as English, peculiarly cold and reserved towards strangers. But in foreign countries, especially in France, I have perceived them gradually thaw into something like the freedom of manner,

which is certainly the most enviable quality of that people.

Many Englishmen, however, are so bigotted to their national manners as to go abroad with a determination not to degrade themselves, as they think it, by mixing with the natives, or even to see any thing in their manners or customs with a favourable eye. And these return home with their original characterisicks even more strongly marked than when they set out; while the benevolent desire, possessed by the other class, to discover good qualities in their neighbours, of itself improves their disposition, and inclines them to adopt imperceptibly the more amiable peculiarities of those with whom they live.

LETTET 6.

CUTTING.

ANOTHER most unamiable practice which I observe to prevail in this country more than ever; I am ashamed to call it a national peculiarity, and yet I fear it is one: is that vulgarly known by the term '*cutting*'. And unaccountable as it may appear, the example of this gothick custom is set by that class which in foreign countries is justly considered the pattern of politeness and urbanity, though not always, I fear, entitled to the same character in this. I am not now speaking of the sort of rule which our cold habits of reserve have established in high life; of not conceiving ourselves bound to know a person again whom we may have met a dozen times in society, and conversed with each time: unless we happen to have been formally introduced to him. This, to be sure, is in itself extremely unsocial, though perhaps in part

to be excused, by our invincible disposition to taciturnity. But the term *cutting* cannot fairly be applied to this practice. In defining it I should say that to cut a person is to pretend to lose one's memory suddenly, as far as it regards the recollection of that person; and this is manifested either by turning the head away and sneaking by him when we meet him; or else, if we can muster assurance enough, by staring full in his face without altering a muscle of our own, and assuming an expression of unconcern, which says; "I never saw you before in all my life!" This last is considered the cut decisive, and it seldom happens, under these circumstances, that the acquaintance is ever renewed.

It is often difficult to surmise from what cause this and similar acts of incivility proceed. Sometimes, and not unfrequently, I believe it is caused, when it adopts a less decisive tone by modest diffidence, which retires from observation

and fears repulse. A state of mind unknown in other countries; because in them the same sort of repulse is not experienced, and therefore not looked for. But there is no doubt this practice, when it assumes the bold, insolent form above described, is occasioned by a haughty, vulgar claim to superiority. At least, I do not see how charity, extended to its utmost limits, can explain it more favourably. Perhaps, for example, you are acquainted with a man of equal rank with yourself, but who fancies himself a person of greater importance, from some accidental circumstance of wealth, connection with people of high station, or some such cause. Well, you meet this man in a quiet corner where there is no room for display, and you converse together in an easy, unreserved manner. The following day perhaps you fall in with the same gentleman again in a more publick place, when he will either make you a distant bow, which marks his claim to superiority, or avoid you altogether.

As this is a trick our countrymen are not so much in the habit of sporting abroad, perhaps from being unaccustomed to it, your memory will not serve you to recollect its prevalence in this country. But I assure you, upon my honour, such incidents as the above occur here every hour, and are therefore not thought remarkable.

"If not so frequent would not this be strange?
That 'tis so frequent; this is stranger still!"

What instigates to this *brutality* (I cannot term it *humanity*) of conduct, is, I imagine, the absurd dread felt by the person guilty of it, lest his dignity should be lowered by his being seen to converse with one of '*no sort of consequence*;' as poor fellows like you and I are styled by such as these.

Now, a slight acquaintance with human nature, as pourtrayed in history, is sufficient to convince us that some such conduct as I have above attempted to describe has ever prevailed more or less in the world, and we need only turn to the instructive pages of Gil Blas to learn that, in other

countries as well as our own, persons raised suddenly from obscurity to an elevated station are apt to fall into this disgraceful error. But what I contend for is, that with us the fault (I might almost call it vice) is not confined to those of the above description. In this rich commercial country instances, of course, abound more than elsewhere, of sudden accumulations of fortune and extraordinary changes of situation; nor can we feel much surprize at observing a corresponding change of manners in the persons thus suddenly exalted. Indeed a Bourgeois gentilhomme, brought at once from the counting house to the house of lords, or at least to associate with the members of that house, may naturally be expected to fall into some absurdities: and though the metamorphosis is not so instantaneous, it is nearly as complete with respect to his wife and daughters, as that of Nell in the Farce; therefore any vagaries they give into are easily excused by people of candour. But I must own it has ever been matter of astonishment to me, that

men born to high rank, and accustomed from their cradles to the sound of titles and to the adventitious circumstances of wealth and station, should so far deviate from the dignified conduct they are obviously called on to exercise, and should lend the authority of their example to a practice alike hateful in itself, and prejudicial to the society of their own country.

Though I am by no means singular in the opinion I have formed on this subject, I have no doubt there are vast numbers who, so far from agreeing with me, will be inclined to treat my notions as calumnious and uncharitable. It is to be remarked, however, that far the greater portion of mankind glide through life without any very nice discrimination of manner or character; and though I scarcely ever met with any body so unobserving as to be ignorant of this system of *cutting*, yet the practice is generally ascribed to *young* people, unacquainted with the world—to *low* people, who are vain of suddenly acquired riches,

or to people, whose manners have been spoiled by education.

Self esteem imperceptibly unites itself with those feelings which cause our attachment to the *faults* even of our countrymen; and, I think, prevents our noticing the full extent of this evil, and acknowledging that it prevails but too generally, not only in the higher ranks of society, but amongst all those persons who are, or wish to be enrolled in the circles of fashion.

It is indeed mortifying to our national, and as a natural consequence, to our personal feelings, to acknowledge the prevalence of so unaccountable and inexcusable a fault. But, unless we wish to add error to error, and to adopt the vain boast of excellence which we condemn in our volatile neighbours, we shall set ourselves seriously to consider whether these things are so, and if they are we shall strive to amend them. The consideration that the ungentlemanly practice above described is scarcely known

in the other civilized countries of Europe, which I really take to be the case, will prove an additional mortification to an Englishman. But, if he will candidly make the enquiry, he will, I have no doubt, convince himself of the fact.

I believe many people adopt this *odd* practice from mere *indolence*. They become acquainted with a person in society, and meeting him only occasionally in the street afterwards, the acquaintance is suffered to die gradually away. This, to be sure, cannot fairly be termed *cutting*; though I am myself so great an enemy to the sort of unpleasant feeling which doubt creates, that I think it would be better, even in a case like this, to come to a mutual agreement not to notice each other at these casual meetings. Like an old lady I knew, who used candidly to tell a person when she was tired of his society, and request not to see him any more.

Do not you recollect my naming to you a curious specimen of *cutting*, in the case of Lady ——, at whose house I dined one day? I sat next her Ladyship on one side, and there happened to be a man of much higher rank on the other; and she literally turned her back upon me the whole time of dinner, nor ever spoke to me, except once that she looked over her shoulder to desire me to help her to some of the dish near me. I recollect your dining there afterwards, and making the same complaint. Yet this was a lady of very high rank, and said to possess very polished manners.

LETTER 7.

TACITURNITY.

THERE is no one of our peculiarities that puzzles foreigners so much as that of our disposition to silence. Their first impression is, that we are at a loss for words in which to convey our thoughts; and it has

frequently happened to me when I have replied in the cold English way, with a few dry words to a long harangue from a foreigner, that the person addressing me has turned to another, with a sort of despair in his countenance, and remarked; "Ah! I find he does not understand me at all." A Spaniard, in writing to his friend from this country, has observed that in our most crowded publick walks the only sound to be distinguished was that occasioned by putting the feet to the ground.*

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* This is certainly not the case in their Alamedas, where the buzz of conversation prevails constantly, except when interrupted by the bell ringing for Vespers; on which an instantaneous and complete silence ensues. The men take off their hats, and the whole remain fixed as statues for two or three minutes, during which they are supposed to address the Supreme Being. The bell then sounds again, and they proceed in their walk and familiar conversation. I have heard this custom ridiculed as superstitious: but if the act of prayer is to be upheld at all, I cannot conceive a more simple or rational exercise of it than this. Whether the practice prevails in other Roman Catholick

Dr. Johnson, whom I have quoted above as condemning our shy reserve in one instance, is represented on another occasion as thus discriminating between the characters of an Englishman and a Frenchman: "Now there, Sir, is the difference between an Englishman and a Frenchman. A Frenchman must be always talking, whether he knows any thing of the matter or not; an Englishman is content to say nothing, when he has nothing to say." My complaint, however, is that he is too apt to leave others to conjecture what is passing in his mind, when he has something to say but does not chuse to say it. To be sure there is a prevailing character in the manners of all nations, which it is in vain to think of changing; and far be it from my wish to transform, if it were possible, British sedateness into French garrulity.

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countries I am ignorant; but I happened to witness it for the first time in one of the crowded walks in Spain, and was much struck with the sublimity of the effect.

The vanity of a Frenchman, as displayed in conversation, is certainly very amusing. He never allows himself to appear ignorant on any subject which happens to be started. Do not you recollect our being at the theatre at Bourdeaux in 1814, when a Frenchman sitting near us asked the name of an English admiral who appeared in uniform in an opposite box? On my telling him it was Admiral *Malcolm*, he mistook what I said, but looking very wise, exclaimed, "Ah! Nelson! l'Amiral Nelson!"—Fully satisfied that this was the great Lord Nelson; about whom, if he knew any thing, one would have supposed he had heard of his having been killed in action several years before, after gaining a splendid victory over his countrymen and the Spaniards. This incident reminded us immediately of Sterne's story about Yorick the King's Jester.

In travelling through the country I used to amuse myself sometimes by putting questions, merely for the sake of listening

to the answers they excited. One day, when on the point of leaving a town in which I had passed the night, observing a tradesman standing idle at his shop-door, I enquired of him how far it was to a town whither I was going. "Monsieur," he replied, "vous avez quinze lieues." I mentioned having been told that the distance was but eleven leagues. "Oh! oui;" rejoined he, directly, "cest presqu' égal—onze ou quinze lieues." Wishing to see how far his politeness would carry him, I suggested that perhaps the actual distance was not above *eight* leagues; between which and eleven, I remarked, there was not much difference. "Ah! Monsieur, a raison:—huit ou onze lieues, c'est à peu près la même chose." I tried to reduce him to five leagues, but he then discovered that I was inclined to *plaisanter*, and wishing me 'bon voyage,' our conversation dropped, and I pursued my journey.

On another occasion, a fellow in a country town was cutting my hair; I told him that, in order tomake it grow thick and well,

I constantly washed it with vinegar, which I preferred greatly to oil. He agreed with me entirely that oil was a nasty, greasy thing, and vinegar far preferable;—said he had an excellent preparation of the latter, which Messieurs les Officiers Anglois did him the honour to approve greatly, and begged permission to bring a bottle of it for my inspection. He returned presently, loaded with bottles; but as the word *huile* was written legibly on each, I objected to take any of them. On this he remonstrated, and assured me on his parole d'honneur, that the huile was *une espéce de vinaigre*, and I had some difficulty in persuading him civilly to quit the room.

But the incident that amused me most, and which you may remember, as I think you were of the party, occurred at one of the palaces near Paris, Saint Cloud, I believe. We were looking about us in the rooms, when an officer of the national guard joined our party, and was very civil in explaining to us all the curiosities of the place. Ob-

serving an allegorical painting on the ceiling of one of the apartments, representing Minerva leading a youth by the hand, I enquired of our friend what it meant. The Frenchman, never at a loss;—toujours prêt—replied directly; "Oh! oui, Monsieur; c'est une Minerve qui conduit"—Here he was puzzled for a moment—but taking courage, he added; (looking doubtingly at me, however, as if he did not feel quite sure of his ground) qui conduit—*une jeune Minerve!*

This to be sure is all ridiculous enough. But because I conceive our manners might be improved by adopting the *civility* of Frenchmen, I by no means recommend taking pattern by their absurdities. And indeed as France is our nearest neighbour, and her manners form the most striking contrast to our own, we are too apt to consider as *French grimace* every deviation from our more reserved or churlish habits. The truth is that although the characteristick marks of French manners are easily de-

fined by those who have been in other countries and have attended to the subject, yet many of those which we class together as French peculiarities are common to most of the continental nations. We are apt to consider the Spaniards, for example, a haughty, retired people. Yet one finds many little acts of civility and attention, which we neglect, in use among them. Such as bowing to a stranger when he enters a coffee room or other place of meeting; or, if the case seems to demand so much attention, even going so far as to *speak* to him:—addressing a few words of civility to a shopkeeper, when they go to purchase any thing of him:—speaking to a man, however low his condition, in passing him on the road in travelling. These and many such, in my opinion, benevolent customs prevail pretty generally on the continent: nor can I conceive, as their basis is humanity, that our dignity would be at all lowered by adopting them.

The people in Europe who partake most with us in this taciturn propensity, are the Dutch, who crowd together in their coffee or club houses, apparently for the sake merely of enveloping themselves in clouds of tobacco smoke;—at least their pipes are seldom taken from their mouths for the purpose of conversing.

Letter 8.

BLUNTNESS.

The word I have adopted above, does not convey a precise notion of the peculiarity I wish to notice, nor am I aware of any English word that does. The French word brusquerie would have given my meaning better, but I preferred heading my letter with an English term, and giving this explanation. The feature I wish to describe under this head, is a kind of blunt, quick, impatience of manner and conduct, which is as strongly marked

as any of our other peculiarities. It would seem to arise too, from the same cause as some of those above described, though under a different form. For our feeling of *independence* gives us a strong notion of our own importance, which manifests itself by impatient turbulence of spirit and restlessness under restraint, while it changes our naturally reserved, silent deportment, into an energetick expression of our feelings, which is apt to astonish and alarm foreigners when they are liable to suffer from its effects, and to amuse them greatly when they are not.

I have seen it remarked by an old Spanish author that at the time he wrote (when the military reputation of Spain stood high) his countrymen were remarkable for evincing in foreign countries an overbearing insolence of behaviour, which they would not have dared to shew at home. Does not this observation apply with too much force to our own countrymen in the present day? I am sure *you*

think it does, and for myself I am convinced it requires all the worth, all the integrity, and all the valour displayed in our *general* conduct abroad, to counteract the bad effects of the numerous deviations from propriety in individuals. In short we do not act in foreign countries on the system, (to use a familiar phrase), of 'give and take'. On the contrary, we are too apt to expect not only an extreme degree of attention and civility, more than we are inclined to shew in return, but we even require the natives of a country to adapt their customs to our's. If they resist our attempts at innovation they are held up to reproach as an insolent, unaccommodating race, and if they yield quietly, as most foreigners, unaccustomed to such boisterous behaviour, are disposed to do, they are stigmatized as mean-spirited and dastardly. To those who have not witnessed the conduct of bodies of their countrymen in foreign lands, this description may appear overcharged; but to us who have so frequently had occassion to de-

plore the ill effects produced by their impetuousness I think you will decide with me that it really is not:—and it is evident that the gross disregard they frequently shew of the customs of foreigners, proves very prejudicial to our national interest.

On one occasion I recollect a set of English freemasons walking in procession at Lisbon, where freemasonry was prohibited under the heaviest penalties. Such an act as this we should have loudly condemned, if put in practice by the French in any of the countries over which they held despotick sway; yet we think it a good joke to treat our friends in this way. The Portuguese government, however, were not inclined to consider it in that light, and they made a serious remonstrance to the British minister on the subject; for the ceremony had caused a considerable degree of agitation in the city. On first observing it they took it for a religious procession, and turned out their guards with the intention of paying it *divine*

honours,* and when they discovered their mistake they were highly indignant.

At another time I remember, a set of English Officers happened to meet with a table d'Hôte, the situation of which they found convenient for dining at. They accordingly resolved to frequent it; but as the table was apt to be more crowded than they found agreeable, they determined to drive away all those who had been previously accustomed to dine there, and this they soon effected by laughing at, and insulting them in every possible way. The natural consequence was, that the landlord became exasperated at losing so many of his customers, and being an Englishman himself, he got drunk one day, and fell to abusing the Officers without mercy: and the affair ended with a battle

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* It is the custom in that, and I suppose in all other Roman Catholick countries, for the guards to turn out and present arms to *the Host* whenever it passes near their Post.

royal, in which the drunken landlord came off worst a second time, and his wife went into hystericks. I fear I must add that those who committed this outrage were not uninstructed, raw boys (of which description many are found in all armies) but young men of the best families and education. Nor are these instances of browbeating insolence uncommon, though predominating more amongst our military, who are wisely kept in so much restraint at home, that they are apt to fly out a little in foreign countries, where the profession of arms is permitted, in some sort, to take the lead. The independe feelings of Englishmen carry them frequently so far in this respect, that I own I am apt to feel nervous when I meet them, in situations where an opportunity offers for shewing their contempt of foreigners and foreign customs. I knew a set of English officers, for example, who were in the habit of going every night to a foreign theatre where they had a box, and carrying large sticks in their hands, for the pur-

pose of thumping vehemently on the floor and against the sides of the box with them, when they chose to express their approbation or discontent; and occasionally calling out to their friends in other parts of the house, to the great dismay of the audience.

I do not mean to say that this defiance of all decent decorum was countenanced in any way by those in command. It took place in a small country town, and no officer of rank was present. But that it should occur at all is disgraceful; nor do I consider it as redounding at all to our credit, that persons of no country but our own would have had the hardihood thus to set themselves up in opposition to established customs. But strange as it may appear, foreigners become sooner reconciled to our odd ways than we do ourselves to the oddities of one another. This may be accounted for, however, by the prevailing habit which exists more strongly in them than in us, to accommodate their

manners and opinions to those of the society into which they chance to fall; and I have sometimes been surprised to find a gross violation of the customs of a place which *I* have viewed with consternation, passed over good-naturedly by the natives as an English frolick. But this friendly construction is not put on our boisterous acts, until a long acquaintance with our real character has established a favourable opinion of us in their minds. Conduct so unconciliating must, in the first instance, produce a very different impression; an impression extremely prejudicial to our comfort as well as to our interest.

This contempt for the customs of foreign nations injuries us materially in another way. On going into a country, whose climate differs widely from our own, we disdain to use the precautions adopted even by the inhabitants of the soil, who have less occasion for them, as being habituated from their birth to the evils they seek to ameliorate. This daring

spirit, to be sure, if kept within due bounds calls for admiration; and there is something captivating to young minds, even in its excess. But when a man becomes older he finds the baneful effects of having despised the *wise* counsel of persons he had considered *foolish*, and wishes in vain he had followed it. The victims to this sort of fool-hardiness in the various parts of the world over which our countrymen are spread, are very numerous. It is a common saying in the Mediterranean, that none but Englishmen and dogs are to be seen out in the heat of the day. Our off-hand argument in this, as in all similar Instances is; "Oh! confound these fellows;—a parcel of lazy, stupid wretches! We never do so in England, why should we here?" Now I think every one, considering the subject calmly, will confess that this is pushing the love of our country a little too far. In short, it may be safely observed that he who does not endeavour to make *truth* direct his national feelings, necessarily allows his partiality to degenerate into self-

ishness. A ready and frank acknowledgment of the virtues or good sense of foreign nations is quite as consistent with the purest and warmest attachment to our country, as a candid judgment of our neighbour's conduct is, with a fair appreciation of our own personal merits; for both these sentiments, though apparently different, should be governed by the same rule of circumspection. We are too apt to persuade ourselves that, because so many others are concerned, we cannot be selfish in our partiality for our country, even when that partiality is carried to an extravagant length. But a sincere wish to be candid will lead us to the conclusion that, whenever we feel unwilling to acknowledge a superiority which we are conscious a foreign nation possesses over us: or are backward to examine fairly whether it does possess the superiority or not, then selfishness prevails as strongly as in the case of personal competition;—and *my* country, *my* merit, *my* virtue may be substituted for *us*, *our* national merit and *our* virtue.

What I have written above may seem to be a deviation from my plan, because it relates to a peculiarity of our countrymen which evinces itself more strikingly, as well as more frequently in foreign countries, and therefore has not fallen so immediately within my observation since I returned to England. But I do not know any of our national traits which you and I have discussed so often and with so much regret when travelling together abroad as this. It therefore naturally occurred to me, in attempting to describe some of our less agreeable peculiarities, to enumerate the above as one, and if the reasoning I have employed on this subject is as much founded in truth as I affirm the facts which produced it to be, I sincerely trust it may have some weight on such of my countrymen as read, and are interested in it. And I am the more inclined to hope they would be disposed to profit by a hint on this subject, from the conviction that the roughness of manner they adopt in foreign countries usually proceeds more from inconside-

rateness than bad intention. Indeed, on cool reflection, no man of humane feelings will contend that such violent proceedings as I have described above can be justified.

Before I conclude this letter I would observe, under the head bluntness of manner, that this very bluntness, under its roughest form is by no means so objectionable as the cool, smooth insolence of a fine gentleman who, in five minutes after he has known and conversed with you, *forgets* having seen you before;—or of a fashionable *friend* who, after a separation of six months, has lost all recollection of your person.

"Blow, blow thou winter's wind;
Thou art not so unkind
As friend remember'd not."

LETTER 9.

ARISTOCRATICK FEELING.

I HAD been accustomed to hear so much in the early part of my life respecting the

democratick character of our constitution, and the great prevalence of aristocratick feeling in the society of the continent, that I had no notion, till taught by experience and observation, how generally the same feeling prevails amongst us. I have attempted above to account in part for the existence of this feeling, by describing the uneasiness endured by men of high rank and station, lest the constant efforts of their inferiours to rival them should succeed.

In consequence of our national wealth there is, no doubt, a great mixture of the classes of society; from which foreigners are apt to conclude that the distinctions of rank with us are but faintly marked, and that tradesmen and peers, dukes, bishops and grocers are all jumbled together in society. This, however, is far from being the true state of the case; for I think, with less *apparent* separation of the classes, there is, in fact, a greater moral distinction of ranks here than in any continental nation, which tends as much as any other cause to the painful constraint of our manners.

It is indeed vexing to think how many drawbacks we create which prevent our enjoying ourselves as we might do in society. To this enjoyment ease is certainly essential. But how seldom do we find ourselves thoroughly at ease. Our characteristick diffidence is perhaps not to be entirely subdued; but, so far from attempting it, it would seem that we invent all sorts of artificial helps to encrease and encourage this uncomfortable feeling; which is manifested in nothing more strongly than in the scrupulous exactness with which attention to rank is observed in private parties. It is very well at a ball, or other publick assembly, that persons of superiour rank should be exalted to the highest places; but the carrying this system into effect at private meetings throws a very unpleasant restraint on society. The custom I think is observed more rigidly the higher the rank of the parties, and the extent to which it is carried, I must confess, appears to me ridiculous. I have, for instance, frequently known the lady of the house where I have

dined, invite her own daughter to place herself above a stranger-lady, whose inferiority of rank perhaps was so trifling as to make a previous search in the Red Book necessary, in order to arrange the precedence. This is indeed, I apprehend, an established rule in the great world, and always practised in similar cases. That is, when the daughter is married.—They have not yet established the same system with respect to the unmarried daughters who are actually at home; but I do not see why they should not, upon the same principle.

The practice, as far as I can judge, is altogether injudicious, as it tends to augment the restraint already much too prevalent in English society. It is to be presumed, as the master of the house selects his own guests, that he will not invite any but those who are fit company for each individual of his own family and for the rest of his party; surely then no harm could arise from the arrangement of the guests

at a private table being left to chance, or to their own inclinations!

The present state of society in France does not offer much ground for imitation. But in old France, when society was on the most agreeable footing, this careful distinction of rank in private life was avoided, or rather it was not thought of. It is impossible where it is so much forced upon the notice, as is commonly the case with us, that any thing like freedom of intercourse, or even of thought should prevail. It may be urged that the restraint excited by this and similar causes will not prevail in the minds of those who are accustomed to its continual exercise. And this is true, to a certain degree. But I am convinced no degree of use has the effect of entirely removing the restraint, and that persons however much in the habit of associating with those of high rank are apt to feel a sort of necessity for turning their faces continually in one direction, viz. towards the head of the

table; which must prove irksome to them. Here then is an additional argument for avoiding the above arrangement of the guests

You will not be prepared, I think, for another proof of our aristocratick spirit which I am about to mention;—the pernicious practice of dividing our churches into pews;* which is never done in foreign,

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* I had made a memorandum on this head before I observed a remark on the subject in the Quarterly Review. They describe this objectionable custom as a remnant of the feudal system; but the universality of the practice has arisen probably from the new feeling of aristocracy created by our commercial habits. In ancient times probably the great man of each parish had his family pew, but by degrees, as the influence of money prevailed, his rich neighbours continued to vie with him and with each other, till at last all our churches have become disfigured to the eye by their tasteless divisions, resembling pens for cattle, and many of them *dishonoured* by being made *receptacles for the rich to the exclusion of the poor*. Many fine ladies and gentlemen would shrink from the thoughts of the seats in a church being open to all classes. But in countries where the practice exists I am not aware that

at least not in roman catholick countries. And surely it is more consistent with Christian principles to leave our worldly honours and distinctions at the church door, and for all classes to consider themselves on that solemn occasion, merely as joint suppliants to the Throne of Mercy. But as we manage it, the poorer classes are not only separated from their superiours, but in many instances they are shut out of the church for want of means to *purchase* a seat within its walls. In London they are, for the most part, *systematically excluded* from the church, and driven to a meeting-house, or what is worse, to an ale-house.

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any inconvenience arises from it. The poor people do not think of intruding on the rich; nor would they here, and the objection to seat oneself by a well-dressed tradesman's wife or daughter can only proceed from a feeling of aristocratick superiority unsuited to the sacred place. But prejudices I know are not to be overcome at once,—and the best way of remedying the evil complained of above, seems to be to appropriate a fair proportion of each church to those who cannot pay:

I wish not to be misunderstood in what I have here asserted. I do not contend that the system is adopted *for the sake* of shutting the church door against the lower classes. But the effect is precisely the same as if it were so intended. Almost all the places are hired by the rich;—scarcely any convenient seats are provided for those who do not pay; and I believe it is well ascertained that taking all the parish churches and chapels of the metropolis together, they will not be found to furnish accommodation *of any kind*, for more than one tenth part of the poorer population. Under these circumstances, how can we gravely continue to talk of our *established* church, or express our astonishment at the vast,—the growing increase of methodists and other sectaries?

I recollect once remonstrating with a man on his attending a methodist meeting, and asking him what made him prefer it to the Church? "I do not know, sir," said he; "I think they are a *kinder* people."

What could one reply to this simple remark? In a church, in London especially, he would have been shoved about and have thought himself fortunate in finding tolerable standing room in a crowd; whereas at the conventicle he was provided with a decent seat and a hassock to kneel on, without paying for it.

Why in a nation of moralizing, thinking people, many of whom have the interests of religion and of our form of it thoroughly at heart not one man has been found to stand up in his place in parliament, and insist on the necessity of an amendment in this particular point, is to me quite inexplicable. If Mr. Wilberforce, or any other respectable man, even without his talents but with equal zeal and perseverance, had once brought the question fairly and distinctly before either house, a certain degree of attention would immediately have been excited towards it, and by following it up session after session a majority would have been roused to exertion, and some material

improvement would undoubtedly have taken place.—How the whole Bench of Bishops can reconcile it to themselves to continue one year after another tacit observers of this alarming evil it is difficult to understand. That they are aware of its extensive prevalence there can be no doubt, and we are led to imagine, from the general respectability of their characters, that many efforts are made by them in secret to attain the great object, to which I have alluded. Still it is obvious their efforts have been hitherto unavailing. It is therefore to be hoped that having failed in secret remonstrance, they will no longer delay to deliver their sentiments in publick, on this most important subject. One reason for their long silence may be drawn from a work published many years since by one of their own body, on the impropriety of removing bishops from a lower to a higher see. This feeling however, cannot affect them all; and I feel disposed to attribute thier apparent supineness to a more worthy motive—perhaps to the dread of rousing the methodis-

tical energies to a still higher pitch, by appearing openly to thwart them.

Certainly my own opinion is that the dissenters have gained much too strong a footing to be silently repressed, or that their numbers can be diminished by any other means than by the strongest efforts and continued exertions of the friends to the establishment. Inertness is said to be a prevailing characteristick of all long established bodies. But that this is not necessarily the case, is abundantly proved by the unceasing industry and zeal of the priests in all Roman Catholick Countries, whatever their other defects may be. And if any respectable member of that community in a foreign country were told, that in London scarce a place is provided in the churches for the lower classes, and no accommodation afforded them without the payment of a sum quite beyond their means to give, he would be inclined to receive the assertion with the same doubt as he would one of General Pillet's infamous calumnies.

I have enlarged rather more on this subject perhaps than I was fairly led to do by the general nature of my remarks. But it is one of a very interesting kind, and I felt inclined probably to dwell on it the longer, by recollecting how thoroughly you concur with me in good wishes for the prosperity of the church establishment.

LETTER 10.

SUPERCILIOUSNESS OF HIGH LIFE.

THE air and tone of insolent superiority too commonly assumed by persons of rank and fashion in this country is very offensive, and at the same time very surprising. In foreign countries it is always considered the mark of a "nouveau riche"; but here, I think, it is not unfrequently observable in the manners of persons of the oldest and most respectable families. In short, I am inclined to consider it one of the most

striking characteristicks by which to distinguish high rank and station in this country.

When evinced in a haughty, cold reserve, the superciliousness of high life is very reprehensible; but by far the worst character it assumes is that of affected condescension. I recollect a fine lady once, whom I had not seen for some time before, asking me, by way of great civility, how I had left all my friends in Ireland.—I had never been in Ireland in my life.

Any species of manner that says as plainly as words can utter it; "I am greatly superiour to you;" must be distressing to the person addressed, and therefore cannot be desirable. As Sir Thomas Browne emphatically observes: "Think not that mankind liveth but for a few; and that the rest are born but to serve those ambitions, which make but flies of men, and wildernesses of whole nations."

To exemplify the sort of insolence I have condemned above, I will mention an anecdote or two.—A friend of mine, by birth and education a gentleman, and of prepossessing and extremely *civil* manners, happened to be crossing over with his horses from Calais to Dover, and finding the master of the packet inclined to impose on him, he went up to an English gentleman whom he saw standing on the quay, and who he understood was going on board the same vessel; and suggested to him that they should make a joint arrangement in order to avoid being cheated. The gentleman, who proved afterwards to be a man of rank, replied with the utmost haughtiness; "I do not chuse any body, Sir, to interfere with *my arrangements.*"

Another friend of mine, recently returned from a long residence in a foreign country, took up his abode in London at one of the most fashionable hotels. Going into the coffee room one evening in cold

weather, and observing a large table placed before the fire, and a solitary individual seated at one end of it, he forgot the coldness of English etiquette for the moment and placing a candle at the other end of the table, as he had been accustomed to do abroad, sat down to read the newspaper. His companion, exasperated at so much disrespect but not deigning to address him, called out immediately in the insolent tone of a man of fashion; "Waiter! take away that candle." My friend quietly told him his mind, gave him his name, and left the room. The aggressor, after a little reflection, very properly apologized for his conduct.

It may be remarked, that an incident of this kind would not have occurred in a foreign country, because sitting down in a publick room at the same table with a stranger is a custom that prevails generally on the continent. But the complaint in this case concerns the harshness of manner adopted to correct a venial offence;—if it

can be called an offence at all;—nor do I believe a *less fashionable* man would have paid any attention to the circumstance.

I remember too, once when I was returning from France, on stopping to change horses at a small place near the coast, I was taking some refreshment at the inn when two English travellers, of the higher class, stopped at the house for the same purpose. Seeing they were fresh from England, I naturally observed their conduct. On being shewn into the publick room in which I was, they strutted in with their hats on, stared at me and walked out again, calling in a peremptory tone for some cold meat. The landlady placed it for them at the further end of my table, which was so long that we should have been separated by a distance of several feet. But I foresaw that this arrangement would not do, and therefore watched their return with some degree of curiosity. Accordingly when they returned from inspecting their carriage, they were greatly disconcerted at finding the refreshment they had ordered

placed on my table, and immediately called to the waiter with a look of horrour to remove it to a distant corner of the room.

Now this happened at a very interesting period of publick events, and as I wore a red coat they might naturally conclude I was an English officer, and might have wished to gratify their curiosity by asking me questions concerning the state of affairs in the interiour. Any being but an Englishman would have acted differently under similar circumstances. Had I observed any thing like *diffidence* in their manner, I should have assured them that their sitting at the same table would be rather agreeable than troublesome to me;—but I was convinced by their style that any overture on my part would be deemed an intrusion, and as they gave me no fair opportunity of addressing them, I left them to entertain each other in their corner.

It is mortifying to confess it; but really the kind of contempt evinced by a man of

distinction, or *fashion* (for there is too much resemblance in their unfavourable peculiarities) towards the other classes of society, approaches in no very distant degree to the hatred of the different *castes* in India towards each other. In general a man of fashion however is conscious only of two castes: his own, consisting of a few hundreds; and the people, amounting to several millions. For in his estimation every man, however "dignified by wisdom, bravery or virtue;"—however distinguished for talent or estimable qualities, is counted as dross,—as nothing, unless he happen to have been initiated in the senseless mysteries of fashionable absurdity.

I recollect being struck with the remark of a great wit, who was himself a man of high family and large fortune, and therefore as much in the society of the great world as he chose to be. "These fellows," said he; speaking of men of fashion, "will not condescend to speak to a man, unless he happens to dine at the same cook-shop!"

Alluding to the contempt with which a member of the club most in vogue speaks of those a step or two lower in fashionable estimation. This illiberal, excluding system I trust, influences in its full extent, only the rigid votaries of fashion, who are so immersed in worldly pursuits as to become quite callous to the feelings of their neighbours. Though I regret to say that something of the same spirit pervades all classes of gentry in this country. Few persons are so absurd as to adopt a prejudice against a man because his coat is not made by Mr.——, or his pantaloons by Mr.——.* But if they will consider the matter fairly, many will find that their dislikes are frequently occasioned by causes nearly as trifling, and which have *fashion* for their basis. Indeed it appears to me, that in spite of our boasted claim to independence, there is no people in Europe such thorough slaves to fashion and precedent as ourselves. A native of a fo-

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* I forbear mentioning the names, for fear of betraying my own ignorance.

reign country may act as he pleases, (provided he act with decorum) and not subject himself to observation. If he is poor he may live in a poor lodging in a poor street; if he has no carriage of his own, he may get into a hackney coach, and take his wife and daughters with him; which few men in this country, above the middling class dare do. When prejudices such as these are adverted to we satisfy ourselves by observing, that in different nations there must be different customs. It is not the *custom* here for ladies to go about in dirty hackney coaches, nor for a gentleman to hide his head in a miserable shabby place. As far as cleanliness interferes I am ready to allow the consideration to have its due weight. But let a hackney coach be produced perfectly new and clean, and I doubt whether the difficulty, in many instances, would be removed. It is the dread of being seen in an inferiour situation that chiefly influences the conduct on these occasoins.—Now surely foreigners, who are in a great measure free from these prejudices,

enjoy life more thoroughly in consequence; —while they act much more rationally than *poor gentlemen* in this country, who are constantly striving to rival the rich in all expenses that come at all within their means. This spirit is now carried so far amongst us that young men of scarcely any fortune flock to taverns of the most expensive kind; and an Ensign in the army is not satisfied, unless he pays the same prices for his clothes as a Prince of the Blood!

However, let those that chuse it persevere in a system of life to which custom has habituated them:—but do not let them carry their prejudices so far as to despise foreigners and those among our own countrymen who have courage to act more wisely. It is really very vulgar to be proud of riches when we do possess them; but the height of folly to pretend to them when we possess them not.

LETTER 11.

TREATMENT OF DEPENDENTS.

THE demeanour observed by persons of rank in this country towards those who act as instructors to their children, has often appeared to me far from commendable. Feelings of humanity certainly prescribe such a line of conduct towards our inferiours as may tend to remove from their minds all unnecessary consciousness of inferiority. This every man of feeling will acknowledge in the abstract though it is too much neglected in practice in this country, particularly, I think, by persons of distinction. People are at great pains to select as tutors and governesses those who have had the best education, and whose manners are pleasing, and therefore worthy of imitation. But as they treat them in general with a cold reserve, and keep them

at nearly the same distance as they do their menial servants, it cannot be expected their children should observe much respect towards them, or that they should profit by what is amiable in their manners or conduct. They are apt to consider them indeed, as mere teachers of that which they find it irksome to learn, and girls especially, who live almost all the early part of their lives in the society of their governesses, contract by this means an early habit of behaving, if not insolently, at least with an unpleasant reserve towards those whom they consider their inferiours.

The kind of hauteur and distance I have here endeavoured to describe, as I have already remarked more than once, is so prevalent in the manners of the great in this country as to be considered a necessary part of their character; and consequently the feelings of those continually exposed to it are not so much mortified as they would be if the prevailing manners were more open and cordial. Still, however, so much reserve

cannot be *agreeable* to any one, while the impression produced by a more benevolent conduct will ever prove highly gratifying.

I do not mean, by any thing I have said, to recommend a familiar and constant intercourse between the parents and the tutor or governess. The business of education requires the frequent withdrawing of teacher and pupil from the scenes of amusement, &c. in which the rest of the family is engaged. All I complain of is a degree of indelicate assumption when they do meet which frequently prevails in the manner of the master or mistress, and which makes those towards whom it is adopted painfully sensible of their dependence.

Even towards servants this kind of manner is by no means to be justified. It is bad on every account. It tends to blunt the feelings of those who adopt it, as well as of the servants themselves. For though the feelings of this class of persons are not refined by education, it is a great errour

to suppose them altogether insensible to the different modes of treatment to which their situation exposes them. There is not a human being in the world, I believe, who may not be more or less influenced by kindness; and it is painful to reflect how much uncomfortable sensation is added to the unavoidable and greater evils of life, by what we are too apt to consider a *proper* distinction in the conduct of an individual towards his inferiours.

I am persuaded, however, that it is extremely erroneous to suppose harshness or superciliousness of manner necessary in our intercourse with those beneath us;—and I am always surprized and shocked when I see a man possessed (in other respects) of the feelings of a gentleman fall into such an errour. It seems indeed natural to a man of a benevolent mind to be more careful not to give offence, by any thing he says or does, to an inferiour than to an equal or superiour; and I have no doubt but *he* is mistaken who

imagines that he is better served by domineering over his dependents. For certainly every individual feels himself entitled to civility, whatever his situation may be relatively to another, and when treated with kindness and steadiness without familiarity, he will be much more inclined to exert himself to please than when addressed as though he were a being of a lower world.

But setting aside the *policy* of the conduct I recommend;—surely the immorality and want of humanity conspicuous in the contrary system are sufficient arguments against its adoption. How can we reconcile it to ourselves to treat any human beings with scorn and contempt, (to which our manner sometimes approaches too nearly) or even with an air of systematick superiority, merely because Providence has thought fit for the few short moments of this probationary scene to place them a little below us!

The familiar intercourse which exists in foreign countries between masters and mistresses and their domesticks appears indeed quite inconsistent, and irreconcilable with our notions and practice. I recollect once when travelling in Spain, happening to join a man of rank of that country, who, with his two sons had just escaped from the French at Madrid. I found him an intelligent, well-bred man: —But, though treated with great respect by the people of the inn at which we stopped for the night, the peasant who accompanied him on foot to take care of his mules, made no scruple of seating himself in the same room with us, nor of helping himself out of the same dish which was prepared for the supper of the two young gentlemen.

I remember too, in one of the finest houses at Lisbon, it was no uncommon thing for the lady of the house, if she wanted another hand at the card-table, to desire one of her principal servants to sit down and play as one of her company.

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The tone of kindness, however, which foreigners in general use in addressing persons of the lowest rank is much to be admired. It is less commonly adopted by us, though I believe it will be found that we pay more attention to their substantial wants. When our servants are ill, for example, much humanity is commonly shewn by their employers in calling in good medical aid, &c.

But the truth is that, although in this country the gentry, including those of the highest rank, are distinguished perhaps above all others for acts of solid and substantial virtue; yet from some unaccountable cause, they act as though it were not incumbent on them to appear amiable, but rather their duty to cloak their numerous virtues under a cold, forbidding, unapproachable exteriour, which proves most injurious to the happiness of society; both because the lesser virtues are much more frequently called into action than the greater and because, from some strange combi-

tion of circumstances, the shyness of a modest amiable man so frequently assumes the same form and semblance as the moroseness of an insolent, haughty character, as to leave a distressing doubt on the minds of those who fall into the society of either.

I should mention, as a further reason for treating our servants with civility, the facility with which they imitate the tone of their masters. One may generally draw a pretty fair conclusion of the master's character by the behaviour of his servants. If the master is of quiet, unassuming manners, the servants naturally acquire the same deportment: and if, on the other hand, his manner is haughty and overbearing, the stranger who knocks at his door does not meet with a very encouraging reception from his porter.

LETTER 12.

GENERAL REMARKS

THOUGH I have no fear, my dear friend, that the motives which have induced me to commit these thoughts to paper will be mistaken by *you*, I think it not improbable they may by others, and therefore I feel anxious to say a *few words* in explanation; —but being very doubtful whether the remarks, or the explanation will be re ad, they shall be but few.

If they are read, I shall probably be accused of presumption in setting myself up at all in judgment on the manners of my countrymen, and of a want of candour in the execution of my task. I cannot plead guilty to either of these charges. There is no one, as you know, more thoroughly and sincerely attached to a country than I am to mine. But in proportion as I feel interested in the welfare of my countrymen, I am anxious to see far removed from them

every appearance of those defects which obscure their virtues, or tarnish in the slightest degree their hard-earned and gloriously acquired reputation. With respect to the points I have ventured to censure, I would observe that although I have considered them sufficiently general to call for remark, I have ever been mindful of many honourable exceptions to the faults I have described; and so far from feeling backward to acknowledge the merits of my country men, I should be more ready to describe them than their failings; but it appeared to me I could do more good by pointing out a few of our leading defects as a counterbalance to the volumes published every day in praise of our numerous virtues. Had I attempted a more complete delineation of our national character it would have led me into a wider field than I think myself qualified to enter. The subject of manners indeed is inexhaustible, but it is one that never can cease to interest; and I could, with satisfaction to myself, extend these remarks to much greater length if I felt any

confidence of their proving acceptable to others. I could expatiate, page after page, on our national virtues, and draw many a comparison between ourselves and foreign nations, the result of which would be favourable to us. But it is dangerous to dwell too constantly on the flattering side of a subject; and though I hope never to lose the impression of our national preeminence, I am most desirous at the same time to bear in mind myself, while I impress on the mind of others, that *we* have faults as well as our neighbours; for, from the contemptuous tone almost universally adopted by us in speaking of foreign customs and manners, an indifferent person (if one could be found) would be led to conclude that we regarded ourselves as perfect, and all foreigners as deficient in every kind of virtue and good breeding. We have no chance, in short, of *discovering* our faults, much less of *amending* them, so long as we continue to hold up our heads and exclaim like the Pharisee; "Lord! we thank thee that we are not like other men, (the people of other countries) extortioners," &c.

This arrogant feeling is uncharitable in itself, and a great bar to improvement; though I am far from alledging that it is peculiar to us. The vanity and conceit of the French, for instance, furnish a proverb to all nations. But it is not by prying into, and constantly recurring to our neighbours' faults that we learn to amend our own:—it is rather by endeavouring candidly to compare what we *are* with what we *might be*. Until this amendment takes place I am sure you will continue to lament with me that so much sterling merit should be shaded, I might say *clouded*, by imperfections that prove destructive to the comfort of society.

People have a way of saying, when you complain of the reserve of one man, the hauteur of a second, the insolent condescension of a third: "If you do not like the manners of these persons why not keep out of their society?" The answer to this is that, in England where reserve is so much

the fashion, and where the obstructions to social intercourse are so frequent, you would soon be left with scarcely an acquaintance if you were to adopt any such system as this. No;—all we have for it is to make the best of the society we fall into, and endeavour to avoid the contagious example of those, whose manners we must on reflection condemn; while we grieve that some few favourable specimens of manner that might be pointed out amongst English gentlemen are not universally followed. If I were permitted to mention one whom I consider as having furnished a fine example of polished, easy manners, I should be inclined to name the late Mr. Fawkener as the most complete instance I have ever known. To those who were acquainted with him I need not designate him more particularly;—they will know by the description to whom I allude; nor will they feel surprized at my pointing him out as a model of suavity and high-bred manners.

Englishmen in general are truly described as constant in friendship, and they evince the possession of kind and good feelings, when these are excited on extraordinary occasions. But they are too apt to forget between the times of exerting their energies that life is, for the most part, made up of trifling occurrences, and that opportunities rarely offer for giving marked proofs of their friendship.

Those, therefore, who are not thrown by some fortunate chance into the current of society, pass the greater part of their time unnoticed and unseen even by the friends who, when roused, would work hard to serve them.

Why do we, as it were, take pains to prove ourselves deficient in amiable qualities;—to suppress all *appearance* of kind feelings? We are really apt to disguise our *warmth* of heart as though we were ashamed of possessing it, and in some cases until it degenerates into *coldness* by continued habit.

I know that, in attempting to point out these diversities in the English character, I am only maintaining what no one doubts, that man is full of inconsistency. But to those who take an interest (and who does not?) in investigating this strange compound of our being, it must surely be matter of curious speculation to examine, and endeavour to ascertain wherein our inconsistencies differ from those of foreign nations; and from what causes the differences arise. It appears to me that our national virtues form, if I may be allowed the expression, the *sediment* of our character. This opinion is derived from observing that foreigners seldom take to us kindly at first, but that they almost invariably come to respect and esteem us when thoroughly acquainted with our character;—and from remarking also that, however unpromising our *exteriour*, (I mean of *manner*) may be we are almost all capable of being roused to worthy exertions, and our good qualities stirred up to some valuable purpose. It is much to be

regretted that we do not manage to make them float on the surface a little more than we are in the habit of doing, and by a prevailing civility and kindness of manner prove at once, even to strangers, that our hearts are good. The stiff reserve in the manners of Englishmen, and more especially in those of high life, renders an attention to certain forms more necessary here than in foreign countries: that, for example, of introducing one stranger to another which used to be the fashion, but seems to be so no longer. We are not happy in our imitations of foreign customs and manners. It may do very well in France, where the manners are naturally easy, to omit this ceremony; but with us the neglect of it is productive of much inconvenience, because we are ever in doubt whether we may presume to speak to each other or not before we are introduced.

The general deportment, however, of a man of rank in this country towards a

foreigner whom he casually meets, is marked by more civility than he employs towards a gentleman who is neither a foreigner nor a man of fashion. This I account for in part by the absence of *competition* and partly by the *ease* of the foreigner's manner which is catching. And as the manners of the highest class in this country, when they are at their ease, are in fact, as elsewhere, the most polished, a foreigner naturally considers their society more agreeable than that of a plain country gentleman, who does not engage so freely in conversation with him perhaps from having had less intercourse with foreigners. For those who visit this country are either persons in official situations, who naturally associate with our leading people, or they are men of some rank at home, and take care to be introduced into the same class of society here.

Many belonging, or considering themselves to belong to this class of greatness

would decide, if they condescended to look at these remarks, that the writer of them is evidently but little conversant with the great world. This truth, however, I am quite ready to admit. All I contend for is that the persons forming this select society have not the art of rendering their manners agreeable to strangers, (of which number I humbly confess myself one) as foreigners almost invariably contrive to do, especially those of the highest class.

I have alluded, in a former letter, to the existence in this country of a strong commercial spirit. That this spirit does prevail amongst us to a great extent is evident, I think, from various circumstances, how much soever we may wish to conceal or deny it;—and in nothing more than our extreme dread of being considered poor. Hence it is that an Englishman, travel where he will, is so unmercifully fleeced. Not that all Englishmen abound in riches, but that the pride of most of them is to be thought rich. Is not this a

vulgar and contemptible feeling? And are not foreigners in some measure excusable for taking advantage of it?

But we shew the high estimation in which we hold money in a variety of ways:—A man of rank receives a sum of money as a compensation for the loss of his wife's honour,—and officers buy and sell their commissions which is not done in any other country. But however we may be inclined to condemn the too great prevalence of this spirit, our intercourse with the world must unfortunately be greatly influenced by it. A rich man; that is, one possessed of an income of £5000 a year, if *really* a gentleman in manners and education, may consider himself so in London. Not with less I think. It is then in his power to create a society about him of his own choice, with less than this it requires a great deal of management to secure any society at all in this country, except in a retired country place and on a very small scale; unless the deficiency in fortune is made up by rank or high connection.

For my own part, I find my poor pittance so inadequate to maintain with decency the character of a gentleman here, that I am induced like many others to seek an asylum in a foreign country :—not so much on account of the cheapness of provisions, &c. not because I despair of vying with the rich, or sigh for the fine things that money alone can purchase ;—but because I find myself in this country almost entirely excluded from society. Now though I am enough of a philosopher to be able to pass a great portion of my time with my books in retirement, I cannot forget that man is a gregarious animal, nor that his chief amusement is, and must be found in society.

And *now*, my dear friend, I will conclude a dissertation which others will probably think tedious, though I flatter myself your friendship for me will induce you to view my remarks in a more favourable light.

FINIS.

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Brief Remarks on English Manners, and an attempt to account for some of our most striking peculiarities in a series of letters to a friend in France

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